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# Illinois Caverns

STATE NATURAL AREA



photo by Ralph Earlandson

# CONSERVATION

Illinois Caverns is located in southwestern Illinois in Monroe County about 35 miles south of St. Louis. The entrance to the cave (which also has been known as Burksville Cave, Mammoth Cave of Illinois, Egyptian Cave and Eckert Cave) is located on a 9.25-acre tract which was purchased by the Department of Conservation in 1985.

Illinois Caverns is the only cave that has been operated commercially in Illinois. In 1901 the cave, which was located on the farm of Frederick Eckert, was leased by a Mr. White of East St. Louis. A bound register kept at the caverns indicates that the first paying sightseers arrived on April 23, 1901. Many early visitors were from the surrounding communities, but others came from distant states and even foreign nations.

Arriving at nearby Burksville Station by train, early visitors were met by horse-drawn wagons and transported the last few miles to the cave entrance. The cavern's passages and formations were illuminated by kerosene lamps attached to the walls. A steady stream of curiosity seekers marveled at the underground wonders during the run of the St. Louis World's Fair, but when the fair closed, visitation to the cave dropped. The first attempt to reap financial benefit from Illinois Caverns ended in 1907.

In 1947, the farm on which the cave was located was sold to William Hayden. Hayden and his nephew then made a second attempt to commercialize the cave. Some improvements were made, including the installation of electric lights in the main passageways. Advertisements proclaimed "Mammoth Cave of Illinois (as the cave was known in the early 1900s) — One of the World's Most Beautiful Caves." The expected throngs of tourists did not materialize and the venture soon failed. Until Hayden's nephew, Robert, sold the cave to the State of Illinois in 1985, the site was only periodically visited.

About the time that the Haydens' venture failed, Armin Krueger became the caretaker of the cave. Krueger was born about a quarter of a mile from the cave entrance and has spent much of his adult life guiding visitors through Illinois Caverns and exploring the caves of Monroe County.

## **NATURAL HISTORY**

The natural beauty that characterizes Illinois is more than skin deep. Some of the state's most significant and scenic wonders lie far beneath the surface — in Illinois' caves. With more than 100 recorded caves, Monroe County has more caves than any other county in Illinois.

The process of cave formation involves the power of water over rock. The rocks that form the base of the Illinois Ozark, Shawnee Hills, and Mississippi Border Natural Divisions are

the sort most susceptible to the forces of water. Millions of years ago, huge shallow seas that covered much of this area deposited many layers of organic and carbonate sediments, forming the limestone and dolomite bedrock that dominate the region today. These types of rocks are easily dissolved and carried off by water, especially along the subterranean cracks or "joints" common to these sedimentary deposits.

Over millenniums of time, the dissolving action of water along the subterranean cracks formed large water-filled conduits or underground streams. Meanwhile, erosion on the surface began to cut valleys into the surrounding countryside. As the surface valleys deepened, some of the underground passages were drained, creating the air-filled passages known as caves.

During the cave-making process, water acts not only as a dissolver, but also as a builder. In the protected cave environment, dripping and seeping water can deposit carbonate materials and form a host of geologic formations.

## **NATURAL FEATURES**

Illinois Caverns contains an extensive array of spectacular cave formations, including stalactites, stalagmites, rimstone dams, flowstone, and soda straws. Many of the formations are actively growing with the continued deposition of calcium carbonate. An underground stream meanders through the cave in its entrenched bed. Throughout the year, the temperature in the cave remains a relatively constant 58 degrees Fahrenheit. Approximately 6 miles of the cavern's passages have been mapped by a caving group from Chicago, the Windy City Grotto.

In addition to these cave formations, Illinois Caverns is home for a delicately balanced and fragile community of animals. The cave has an outstanding invertebrate fauna, including the largest-number of cave-adapted animals known from any cave in Illinois. The cave salamander and at least two species of bats, the Little Brown Bat and Eastern Pipistrel, are commonly found in the cave.

## **SPECIAL SITE RULES**

- Because Illinois Caverns is a substantially wild, unimproved cave system, visitors must use adequate safety equipment, including hard hat, 3 dependable sources of light, leather boots, and suitable protective clothing. Visitors should plan on getting their feet wet.
- Visitors are required to read and sign a cave exploration permit before entering the cave. Permits are available at the cave or by contacting the Site Interpreter.
- Everything in the cave is protected by law. You may NOT disturb or remove any natural, geological, or biological ma-





*"Capitol Dome"*

photo by Ralph Earlandson

materials from the cave. TAKE NOTHING BUT PHOTOGRAPHS, LEAVE NOTHING BUT FOOTPRINTS.

### **FACILITIES**

A small picnic area with tables and an outdoor privy is located adjacent to the cave entrance and parking lot. Camping and alcoholic beverages are prohibited.

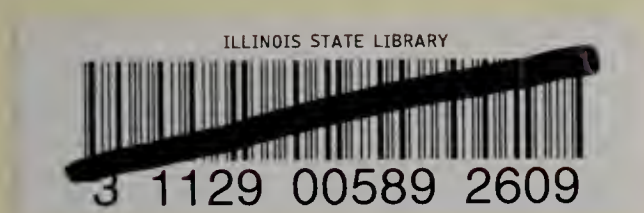
### **FOR YOUR INFORMATION**

Illinois Caverns is open to visitors with valid permits during the period from April 16 — October 14, 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m., and from October 15 — April 15, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Groups of 25 or more persons will not be admitted to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the Site Superintendent has been granted to use the facilities. In addition, groups of minors must have adequate supervision and at least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 5 minors.

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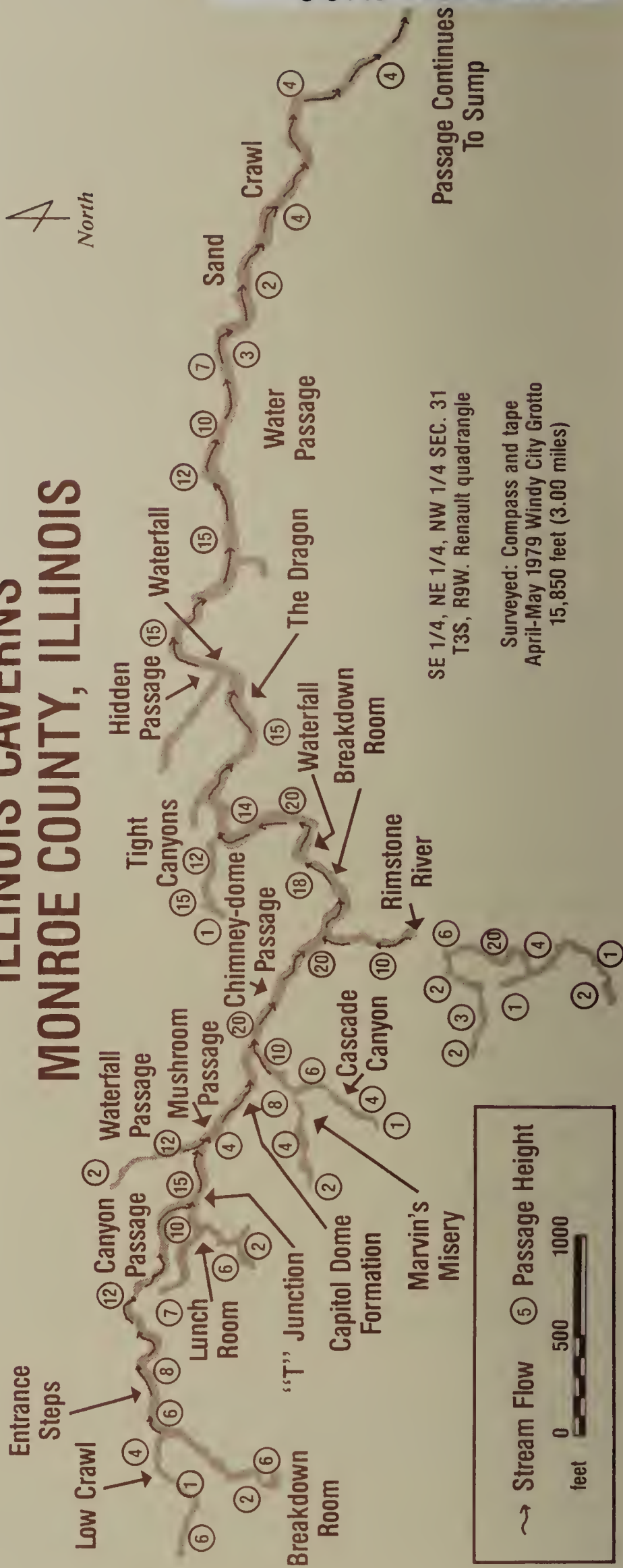
For more information about this site or to obtain a permit to enter the cave, contact the Site Interpreter, R.R. 4, Waterloo, IL 62298, phone: 618/458-6699. Illinois Caverns is a satellite of Kaskaskia River State Fish & Wildlife Area, Route 1, Baldwin, IL 62217, phone: 618/785-2555. For more information about other sites, write the Illinois Department of Conservation, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62706.





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# ILLINOIS CAVERNS MONROE COUNTY, ILLINOIS



SE 1/4, NE 1/4, NW 1/4 SEC. 31  
T3S, R9W. Renault quadrangle

Surveyed: Compass and tape  
April-May 1979 Windy City Grotto  
15,850 feet (3.00 miles)